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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to present the results of a study on public relations activities of practicing school psychologists. School psychologists have been called upon to take responsibility for increasing awareness of the profession and building partnerships with potential consumers. With the Practical Strategies initiative and suggested best practices in public relations, the issue of public relations has garnered heightened interest in the National Association of School Psychologists' community. This study was conducted to investigate to what extent practitioners are engaging in these recommended activities, specifically those that target teachers, parents, and students. The importance of public relations activity was discussed, along with the suggested activities present in the literature. Results of the study were also discussed, including the activities practitioners employ, a description of the visible school psychologist, and participants' thoughts on the issue of public relations. (Author/GCP)

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School Psychologists on the Public Relations Front:

What are Practitioners Doing?

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Abstract

School Psychologists on the Public Relations Front:

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The purpose of this session is to present the results of a study on public relations activities of practicing school psychologists. School psychologists have been called upon to take responsibility for increasing awareness of the profession and building partnerships with potential consumers. With the Practical Strategies initiative and suggested "best practices" in public relations, the issue of public relations has garnered heightened interest in the NASP community. This study was conducted to investigate to what extent practitioners are engaging in these recommended activities, specifically those that target teachers, parents, and students. The importance of public relations activity will be discussed, along with the suggested activities present in the literature. Results of the study will also be discussed, including the activities practitioners employ, a description of the "visible" school psychologist, and participants' thoughts on the issue of public relations. Attendants will leave the session with an increased understanding of public relations/visibility raising activities and a knowledge of what current practitioners are doing on this front.

Summary

The issue of public relations in school psychology has received considerable attention in the NASP community with the "Practical Strategies for Expanding Services to Children and Families" initiative (Thomas, Pluymert, & Armistead, 1998). School psychologists have been called upon to take responsibility for increasing awareness of their profession and building partnerships with potential consumers. Raising visibility is important not only for role expansion opportunities, but also for developing increasingly successful partnerships with other professionals (Baas, 2000).

Kelly (1995) has also written on the need for public relations at the building-level for school psychologists. By communicating their role to potential consumers of psychological services, school psychologists raise knowledge of what they currently do and can do to serve children. Teachers, parents, and students are three major groups that school psychologists must connect with to maximize effective service delivery.

Much research has been done concerning the amount of time school psychologists spend in more traditional activities such as testing, counseling, consultation, paperwork, etc. (reviewed in Fagan & Wise, 2000). However, no research was found concerning what public relations/visibility raising activities practitioners employ or how often they do so. The purpose of this session is to fill this gap by presenting the results of a study on public relations activities of practicing school psychologists.

This study was conducted to investigate to what extent practitioners are engaging in the recommended "best practices" and "practical strategies" in PR, specifically those that target teachers, parents, and students. To accomplish this goal, a questionnaire was developed based on the recommended practices of Kelly (1995) and Thomas, Pluymert, & Armistead (1998). It was then mailed to a total of 305 members of four regional school psychology associations in Ohio. The return rate was near 50%.

Results of the study indicate that time is a major factor in the ability or willingness of school psychologists to engage in public relations activities. While some activities that are rarely employed do involve a time commitment (e.g., writing an article for the teacher association newsletter), others do not (e.g., sending a student a congratulations note for an accomplishment). Overall, practitioners target teachers the most, followed by parents, then students.

High public relations activity was associated with state and international school psychology association memberships, specifically directed toward parents. It is likely that that practitioners who are involved in their schools are involved outside of their schools as well. Practitioners who serve junior high/middle schools or high schools had lower PR activity than those who did not, specifically in regard to teachers. Psychologists working in suburban and urban districts had higher PR activity than those working in rural districts. This may be related to school psychologist to student ratios, as lower ratios are associated with higher PR activity and rural school psychologists had higher ratios.

Practitioners who reported high PR activity were more likely to report being satisfied with that activity, suggesting that those with low PR activity may wish to do more. The most common reason respondents reported doing PR was desire. Furthermore, those doing PR due to desire or consumer appreciation had higher PR activity. Those doing PR because they were required to had lower PR activity. Having not enough time was the most frequently given reason for not engaging in PR activities. Respondents also reported believing PR is important, helps to educate others about their roles and functions, and makes them more accessible and approachable.

Future research may address the effects of engaging in these PR activities, both from a consumer and school psychologist perspective. Further information on personal and job characteristics that are related to

higher public relations activity and ways to make it possible for school psychologists to employ more of these activities, are interesting areas open for exploration.

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School Psychologists on the Public Relations Front: What are Practitioners Doing?

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Importance of Communication Activities/Public Relations

- System Influence
- Avoiding the "Stealth School Psychologist"
- Greater Service Delivery
- Keeping the Fire Burning
- Recruitment for the Future

Why Bother with this Research?

- Much Chat, Little Action
- No Baseline Information
- Illusory But Important Topic
- Identify Barriers
- Beginning the Conversation

How the Study was Conducted

- Creating the Questionnaire
- Getting the Sample
- Receiving the Questionnaires
  - ≈ 50% Return Rate
- Doing the Analysis
  - Public Relations Scores
  - Significant Findings

Results

- Demographics
- Responses to Questions
  - Overall PR Activity
  - Consumer Groups
  - Demographic Relationships
  - Reasons
  - Thoughts

Discussion

- Importance of Working with our School Constituencies
  - Parents, Students, Teachers, Administrators, Support Staff, Community
- The Issue of Time
  - Balance
  - Priorities
- Future Directions

Most Frequent Activities

Activity	*% "Always" or "Most of the Time"*	*Target*
1. Greet faculty by name in halls	97.3	Teacher
2. Return phone call within 24 hrs	88.6	Teacher
3. Greet students by name in halls	86.6	Student
4. Meet with parents when they have a concern	79.9	Parent
5. Attend class or workshop in school psychology	71.1	Student
6. Give handout to parent on topic of concern	67.1	Parent
7. Attend faculty meeting	57.8	Teacher
8. Presentation to parent group	57.7	Parent
9. Positive referral to principal for student success	55.0	Student
10. Presentation to faculty	53.0	Teacher

Most Infrequent Activities

Activity	*% "Rarely" or "Never"*	*Target*
1. Write article for teacher association newsletter	93.29	Teacher
2. Include a "tips for parents" sheet with report cards	92.62	Parent
3. Write letter to parents at start of school year about services	88.59	Parent
4. Sponsor/ advise/coach a student group	84.56	Student
5. Include something in school newsletter	76.52	Parent
6. Attend or help plan student recognition program	74.50	Student
7. Offer a parenting class	71.14	Parent
8. Presentation to students	71.14	Student
9. Treat student to lunch for accomplishment	69.13	Student
10. Send student congrats note for a success	57.04	Student

Public Relations Scores

	Overall PR		PR for Parents		PR for Students		PR for Teachers	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Overall	99.59	15.45	34.35	5.53	36.23	6.13	29.01	5.98
Gender								
Female	98.47	15.37	33.88	5.52	35.97	6.35	28.61	5.78
Male	103.26	15.34	35.89	5.32	37.06	5.35	30.31	6.53
District								
Rural	107.36	13.32	35.80	5.53	38.31	5.42	33.26	4.68
Suburban	97.14	15.37	33.79	5.60	35.94	6.27	27.42	5.36
Urban	96.22	15.46	33.97	5.26	34.53	6.12	27.72	6.56
Preschool								
Yes	100.04	17.01	33.94	6.13	36.74	6.19	29.36	6.82
No	99.51	14.69	34.59	5.23	36.01	6.12	28.91	5.53
Elementary								
Yes	99.01	15.38	34.05	5.49	36.00	5.94	28.96	6.05
No	102.48	15.73	35.69	5.65	37.31	6.89	29.48	5.75
Junior/Middle								
Yes	101.74	16.27	34.93	5.68	36.51	6.57	30.29	6.39
No	97.53	14.33	33.78	5.35	35.99	5.68	27.76	5.24
High								
Yes	103.14	15.36	35.13	5.27	37.20	6.20	30.81	5.99
No	96.59	14.96	33.69	5.71	35.41	5.99	27.49	5.54
OSPA								
Yes	98.00	15.04	33.72	5.36	35.73	6.13	28.55	5.73
No	105.65	15.71	36.74	5.56	38.13	5.81	30.77	6.67
NASP								
Yes	98.80	15.89	33.84	5.56	36.04	6.06	28.92	6.27
No	101.68	14.18	35.68	5.28	36.73	6.34	29.27	5.22
ISPA								
Yes	80.67	13.05	25.67	6.81	32.33	1.53	22.67	6.03
No	99.98	15.29	34.53	5.38	36.31	6.16	29.14	5.93

Note. Lower scores indicate more PR.

Targeted Groups

Teachers >* Parents >* Students
*: $p < .0001$

Variables

Gender
Years Practicing
Association Memberships*
Grade Level Served*
Type of District*
School Psychologist to Student Ratios*
Satisfaction*
Reasons for Engaging in PR*
Reasons for Not Engaging in PR

*: *Significant Relationship*

Association Membership

OSPA Member > Nonmember ($p < .05$)
- Higher targeting of parents ($p < .01$)

NASP Member = Nonmember

ISPA Member > Nonmember ($p < .05$)
- Higher targeting of parents ($p < .01$)

Grade Level Served

Preschool – no differences

Elementary – no differences

Junior High/Middle
- Less PR Directed Toward Teachers

High School
- Less Overall PR
- Less PR Directed Toward Teachers

Type of District

Overall PR
- Urban & Suburban > Rural
  $p < .005$, $p < .001$

Parent PR
- No Differences

Student PR
- Urban & Suburban > Rural
  $p < .01$, $p < .05$

Teacher PR
- Urban & Suburban > Rural
  $p < .0001$ for both

Correlations Between PR Scores and School Psychologist to Student Ratios

	Correlation	P-Value
Ratio, Total PR	.387	< .0001
Ratio, Student PR	.472	< .0001
Ratio, Teacher PR	.322	< .001
Ratio, Parent PR	.214	< .05

Higher ratios = higher PR scores = less PR activity

Correlations Between PR Scores and PR Satisfaction

	Correlation	P-Value
Satisfaction, Total PR	-.258	< .005
Satisfaction, Student PR	-.236	< .01
Satisfaction, Parent PR	-.224	< .01
Satisfaction, Teacher PR	-.217	< .01

Higher satisfaction = lower PR scores = more PR activity

Reasons for Engaging in PR Activities

Reason	*Number Indicating*	Percent Indicating
*Desire	109	73.65
Beneficial	98	66.22
*Consumer Appreciation	47	31.76
Other	31	20.95
**Required	12	8.11

*: Significantly More PR **: Significantly Less PR

"Other" Responses

1. Sharing/expanding role
2. Fosters positive relationships (rapport/trust)
3. Concern for others
4. Enjoyment
5. Good practice/appropriate

Reasons for Not Engaging in PR Activities

Reason	Number Indicating	Percent Indicating
No Time	121	81.76
Other	44	29.73
No Desire	17	11.49
Not Beneficial	8	5.41
Don't Know How	3	2.03

Note. Respondents could indicate more than one reason.

"Other" Responses

1. Hadn't thought of some of the activities
2. Live far from schools
3. Not requested/invited
4. Someone else does PR
5. Caseload too high

Thoughts on the Issue of "Public Relations"

Comment	Percent Indicating
1. PR is important	35.24
2. Time is an issue	19.05
3. PR Lets others know what they do	13.33
4. PR makes them more accessible/approachable	10.48
5. Doing a good job is good PR	9.52
6. Fear of advertising more than they can deliver	9.52
7. District/administrator expectations hinder PR	8.57
8. PR Can help foster positive relationships	7.62
9. Too many evaluations/assessments	7.62
10. PR Builds trust	4.76
Survey gave good ideas/Copy survey to use as suggestions	4.76
Wish could do more	4.76

Note. Percentages are out of the 105 participants who commented on this question.

Survey Return Rate by Region

	Number of Surveys Mailed	Number of Usable Surveys Received	Usable Return Rate
Overall	305	149[a]	48.85%
Region 1	121	44	36.36%
Region 2	31	16	51.61%
Region 3	24	17	70.83%
Region 4	129	72	55.81%

[a] Twenty returned surveys were unusable.

Demographic Data

	Count	Percent of Respondents
Total	149	
Gender		
Male	35	23.49%
Female	114	76.51%
Type of District[a]		
Rural	39	26.35%
Urban	32	21.62%
Suburban	77	52.03%
Grade Levels Served[ab]		
Preschool	50	33.78%
Elementary	119	80.41%
Junior/Middle	76	51.35%
High	70	47.30%

Demographic Data Continued

	Count	Percent of Respondents
Regional Association		
Region 1	44	29.53%
Region 2	16	10.74%
Region 3	17	11.41%
Region 4	72	48.32%
Association Memberships		
Regional	149	100%
State (OSPA)	118	79.19%
National (NASP)	108	72.48%
International (ISPA)	3	2.01%
	Median (Range)	Mean (SD)
Years Practicing	14 (1 to 35)	14.01 (8.9)
Psychologist : Student	1:1,500 (112 to 5,300)	1: 1,534.39 (720.57)

[a] One missing value.
[b] Respondents could indicate more than one grade level primarily served.

Activities of School Psychologists

Instructions for items 1 – 7: Please answer by circling or writing in the appropriate response.

1. I am currently a school psychologist practicing in at least one school building. Yes No
2. Gender: Male Female
3. Years practicing as a school psychologist: _____
4. School psychologist association memberships: Regional State National International
5. Grade level(s) you primarily serve: Preschool Elementary Junior/Middle High
6. Type of District: Rural Suburban Urban
7. School psychologist to student ratio: _____

Instructions for items 8-39: Read each of the following statements. Please indicate how often you engage in each activity by circling the appropriate number using the following scale:

When the opportunity arises, I do the listed activity:

1	2	3	4	5
All of the time	**Most of the time**	**Some of the time**	**Rarely**	**Never**

8.	I have something to be included in my school newsletter.	1 2 3 4 5
9.	I eat lunch with teachers.	1 2 3 4 5
10.	I offer parenting classes if there is special topic of concern.	1 2 3 4 5
11.	I provide a presentation to the faculty when they express a concern/interest on a specific topic.	1 2 3 4 5
12.	I attend school social functions.	1 2 3 4 5
13.	I hold some open office hours during the week.	1 2 3 4 5
14.	I send a student a congratulatory note for an accomplishment.	1 2 3 4 5
15.	I meet with parents/guardians when they express a concern/interest about a specific topic.	1 2 3 4 5
16.	I give a parent/guardian a handout on a topic of concern/interest.	1 2 3 4 5
17.	I call the parents/guardians of a student on my caseload - when it is not time to schedule a meeting.	1 2 3 4 5
18.	I make a positive statement to the principal for a student success.	1 2 3 4 5
19.	I greet a teacher or staff member I see in the hallway by name.	1 2 3 4 5
20.	I make a home and/or work visit for a parent/guardian who is unable to visit during school hours.	1 2 3 4 5
21.	I return a phone call within 24 business hours.	1 2 3 4 5
22.	I am available to give a presentation to a meeting of the school parents' group on a current topic of concern/interest.	1 2 3 4 5
23.	I attend a class and/or workshop on school psychology.	1 2 3 4 5
24.	I attend a faculty meeting.	1 2 3 4 5
25.	I give a presentation to students about my services and how to contact me.	1 2 3 4 5
26.	I serve on a building committee.	1 2 3 4 5
27.	I attend and/or help plan a student recognition program.	1 2 3 4 5
28.	I sponsor/advise/coach a student group.	1 2 3 4 5

When the opportunity arises, I do the listed activity:

1	2	3	4	5
All of the time	**Most of the time**	**Some of the time**	**Rarely**	**Never**

29.	I learn about a different culture represented by a student in my school.	1 2 3 4 5
30.	I write a letter to parents at the beginning of the school year explaining my services and how to contact me.	1 2 3 4 5
31.	I attend a special student event (e.g., concert, play, sporting event).	1 2 3 4 5
32.	I visit a classroom - when I don't have a specific student to observe.	1 2 3 4 5
33.	I hold a student session in an alternative setting (e.g., while taking a walk, sitting on swings, shooting baskets, etc.).	1 2 3 4 5
34.	I write an article for the teacher association newsletter.	1 2 3 4 5
35.	I treat a student to lunch for an accomplishment.	1 2 3 4 5
36.	I greet a student I see in the hallway by name.	1 2 3 4 5
37.	I include a "Tips for Parents" sheet to be sent out with report cards.	1 2 3 4 5
38.	I contact a parent/guardian when his/her child is successful.	1 2 3 4 5
39.	I send a congratulatory note to a teacher who has done something special with a student.	1 2 3 4 5

Instructions for items 40-42: Please answer by circling the appropriate response.

40. How satisfied are you with the amount of time you spend in public relations activities?

Not At All Satisfied Somewhat Satisfied Very Satisfied

41. Why **DO** you engage in the public relations activities that you do (circle all that apply)?

Beneficial Consumer Appreciation Desire Requirement Other (Please specify) __

_____

42. Why **DON'T** you engage in other public relations activities (circle all that apply)?

Don't Know How Not Beneficial No Time No Desire Other (Please specify) _____

_____

43. What are your thoughts on the issue of "public relations?"

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____